

CALIFORNIA BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE
Minutes of the December 13, 2006, Meeting
Monterey, California

The commission meeting began at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, December 12 at the Portola Plaza Hotel with dinner and a presentation on permanency for foster youth, by Mr. Pat O' Brien.

Mr. O'Brien is the Founder & Executive Director of *You Gotta Believe! The Older Child Adoption & Permanency Movement, Inc.* You Gotta Believe is one of the few placement agencies in the country that limits its practice to finding permanent homes for teen and pre-teen children in foster care.

Justice Carlos R. Moreno, chair, called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday, December 13, 2006, at the Marriott Hotel in Monterey.

Commission Members Present: Hon. Carlos R. Moreno (chair), Ms. Mary Ault, Hon. Karen Bass, Hon. Richard C. Blake, Mr. Lawrence B. Bolton, Mr. Curtis L. Child, Ms. Miryam J. Choca, Mr. Michael Cunningham, Ms. Karen J. Dotson, Dr. Jill Duerr Berrick, Hon. Leonard P. Edwards (Ret.), Mr. Raul A. Escatel, Ms. Deborah Escobedo, Hon. Terry B. Friedman, Hon. Richard D. Huffman, Hon. Susan D. Huguenor, Ms. Teri Kook, Ms. Miriam Aroni Krinsky, Ms. Amy Lemley, Mr. Will Lightbourne, Hon. Bill Maze, Ms. Donna C. Myrow, Hon. Michael Nash, Mr. David Neilsen, Ms. Diane Nunn, Mr. Ken Patterson, Mr. Derek Peake, Ms. Linda Penner, Mr. Anthony Pico, Ms. Patricia Ploehn, Ms. Pat Reynolds-Harris, Mr. Gary C. Seiser, Mr. Alan Slater, and Hon. Dean Stout.

Commission Members Not Present: Hon. Michael D. Antonovich, Hon. John Burton (Ex-Officio), Mr. Joseph W. Cotchett, Hon. Kathryn Doi Todd, Ms. Maria D. Robles, Ms. Jennifer Rodriguez, Mr. Joseph L. Spaeth, and Hon. Darrell S. Steinberg.

Commission and Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) Staff: Mr. Christopher Wu (lead), Ms. Jaden Alexander, Ms. Aleta Beaupied, Ms. Mara Bernstein, Ms. Karen Cannata, Ms.Carolynn Castaneda, Ms. Charlene Depner, Ms. Sidney Hollar, Ms. Tracy Kenny, Mr. David Meyers, Mr. Lee Morhar, Ms. Chantal Sampogna, Ms. Sonya Tafoya, Ms. Renee Wessels, Mr. Don Will, and Ms. Leah Wilson.

Others Present: Ms. Jessica Ambroz, Mr. Dominic Chappell, Mr. Mark Courtney, Ms. Karen De Sa, Ms. Sue Diedrich, Ms. Amy Dworsky, Ms. Ana Espana, Ms. Jo Frederick, Mr. Bob Friend, Mr. Rob Geen, Ms. Jessica Gunderson, Hon. Scott Harman, Ms. Shahla Helalian, Ms. Caroline Huffman, Ms. Becky Maze, Mr. Frank J. Mecca, Ms. Patricia Pianko, Mr. Elliott Robinson, Ms. Krystal Rojas, Ms. Anahita Savernejad, Ms. Elizabeth Walker, Mr. Kevin West, Hon. Denise Whitehead, and Hon. Nancy Williamsen

Dinner guests of the commission included judges and local officials from Monterey County. Justice Moreno made brief welcoming remarks and a short video was shown of the presentation to the Judicial Council marking November as Adoption and Permanency Month. The video showed remarks by college student Nancy O'Reilly who was adopted at age 24 by her former foster care social worker.

Item 1 **Remarks From the Chair**
Justice Carlos R. Moreno, Chair

Justice Carlos R. Moreno reviewed the operational framework that summarizes what the commission is setting out to do. At the initial meeting, a set of principles and values was developed. It has been incorporated with detailed points into a formatted document.

He referred to a matrix that sets out the different components of the public education plan and provides a mission statement. The matrix can be used to provide accurate and succinct information. Another document includes the objectives and a work plan that sets out all the meetings and the focus of each meeting.

A visual timeline, included in the packet, was also pointed out by Justice Moreno. It details where the commission has been, where it is today, and where it is going. He noted that the March meeting will be a session on resources in Sacramento, an educational session will be scheduled, and a session on collaboration issues will be held in June. In September the subcommittees will present their recommendations. A final report to the Judicial Council is due in April 2008.

Justice Moreno spoke about today's agenda to put into context what the commission will be doing. He reminded commission members to focus on the charge to provide recommendations to the Judicial Council on the ways in which the courts and their partners can improve the safety, permanency, well-being, and fairness outcomes for children in foster care. The recommendations are due in 15 months. He emphasized that the principal focus is on the courts, but the courts do not operate in isolation so the commission should solicit input from all stakeholders. The outcomes achieved will tell if the commission has been successful.

Justice Moreno went on to summarize the commission's objectives:

1. Critical—A comprehensive set of politically viable recommendations for how the courts and partners can improve child welfare outcomes, including an implementation plan with key milestones
2. Improved court performance and accountability
3. Improved collaboration
4. Public awareness and education

Justice Moreno reviewed and highlighted many of the items from the previous meeting. He also reviewed the reports on the commission's principles and values and welcomed additional comments or points.

Justice Moreno further reviewed the morning's agenda and noted that agendas for the various subcommittee meetings were included in the meeting binder for everyone's review. The focus of this meeting would be on significantly older youth. He highlighted Pat O'Brien's presentation on older child adoption and permanency at the commission dinner, held the evening of December 12.

Item 2 Commission Activities
Mr. Christopher Wu, Lead Staff

Mr. Wu introduced commission member Mr. Anthony Pico, who said that he has been newly appointed to the San Francisco Youth Commission, which oversees all youth legislation that passes through San Francisco City and County. Mr. Pico represents Native American and foster youth. He noted that the San Francisco Youth Commission is taking on foster care and its members are more than willing to assist him to improve the system.

Mr. Wu introduced Ms. Amy Dworsky from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, who has undertaken some of the research on data that follows foster youth through and out of the system. Mr. Wu said that it is an ongoing study and that Ms. Dworsky would describe the study and some of the findings.

As Ms. Dworsky prepared to make her presentation, one of the members of the commission pointed out that if the commission's values are to include youth empowerment and youth having a voice in the process, it was suggested that it be added to the list of value statements. In regard to the commission's principles, it was noted that the line stating "outcomes should not be based on race" could be taken to mean that everything should be race neutral and we should do nothing to address the disproportionate representation issue. It was also mentioned, again relating to the list of values, that permanency should also be listed.

Item 3 Foster Youth and the Transition to Adulthood
*Ms. Amy Dworsky, Senior Researcher, Chapin Hall Center for Children,
University of Chicago*

Ms. Dworsky discussed a Midwestern study intended to track the outcomes of youth aging out after the juvenile dependency. Aftercare Act was implemented and to provide states with guidance in terms of what they can do to better serve these youths. She related the motivation behind the study and gave a brief history of the legislation, the study design, some of the findings of the study, and what the researchers think are the policy implications of the study. It is the largest longitudinal study on the topic of whether there have been significantly improved outcomes in foster care. Three states were used for this study: Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa. The study began in 2002, with the first of three phases. Stage one began with 732 youths, 96 percent of whom were eligible for the study. Stage two interviewed 19-year-olds, and stage three, which will be finished at the end of this month, is interviewing 21-year-olds.

Item 4 Needs of Transitioning Youth
*Ms. Shahla Helalian, Independent Living Program Coordinator, Independent
Living Program and Transitional Housing Plus, Santa Cruz Community
Counseling Center*

Ms. Helalian introduced a youth panel. She noted that the Independent Living Program and Transitional Housing Plus are designed to help pay the rent for youths ages 18 to 21 who are leaving the foster care system. It is a new program. She works with the youths to help them find, obtain, and keep housing. The youths on the panel shared their experiences of entering the foster care system, being in it, and coming out of it. All stated that they felt the age limit for foster care

program should be extended to 21. Time was allotted for questions and comments, which were extensive.

Mr. Wu concluded that the discussion brought up some very good points and that, as the commission looks at what remains to be done and the long-term strategies, this information will aid in crafting a set of recommendations.

Mr. Wu proposed that the commission work on a set of strategies and recommendations that come from the material, discussions, and presentations and the additional resources mentioned. He further suggested that, at another time, it would be valuable to get a cross section of input on the highest priorities for the commission's work.

Item 5 Community Care Licensing Regulations

Ms. Jo Frederick, Deputy Director, California Department of Social Services

Ms. Jo Frederick gave an update on ongoing work on the community care licensing (CCL) regulations. Her department licenses and enforces about 80,000 community care facilities in California. It covers child care (infant, preschool, home based), adult care (residential facilities, foster parents' group homes), and senior residential facilities. There are 1,100 staff and 36 offices throughout California. The CCL workgroup has been looking into several areas but focusing on issues that may impede licensing. Part of its work came out of a budget committee hearing last fall during which a large group of stakeholders told what they are experiencing or not experiencing with CCL and what things people want CCL to look at. The "prudent parent" standard is a piece of what the workgroup members are looking into. They are finding significant barriers to normalcy. The children want normalcy and don't want to be labeled; they want to participate in decisions that affect their lives. The CCL workgroup is finding it may not just be an issue of changing or enforcing the regulations but that some laws may need to be changed, as well as some policies and practices, including those relating to CCL. CCL's health and safety perspective may not be the most appropriate take in all situations. Another issue the workgroup is looking into is whether people should be licensed who may never get a placement.

Item 6 Commission Public Education Plan

Ms. Renee Wessels, Communications Specialist (Consultant), AOC Center for Families, Children & the Courts

Ms. Wessels said that she is a consultant brought on to help the commission with work plans and schedules for the year and to propose a plan for a possible course of action in public education and outreach. She highlighted the plan, which was included in the binders, and noted that it is quite detailed, even at this stage. The comprehensive plan will look at resources and implementation. Ms. Wessels acknowledged everyone who has helped her develop the ideas through to implementation. She thanked Miriam Aroni Krinsky, Curtis L. Child, Jennifer Rodriguez, and Gary C. Seiser for their help in developing the ideas for the plan.

This two-year plan sizes up what the commission will be able to find resources for as it moves forward. The plan outlines the strengths and the challenges of the commission in relation to the issues being tackled. The overarching goals for the plan are to build understanding of the commission and garner support for its recommendations. The objective that guides this effort is making sure the commission is supported with messages and wording that help describe its

purposes, work, and achievements. Three areas of focus are improved court performance, collaboration, and funding resources.

This means developing easily understandable materials. Media coverage is important. Specialized outreach should be undertaken to the most important audiences. Key audiences are identified as the Judicial Council, the courts, policymakers, child welfare agencies that partner with the courts, advocates, other stakeholders, the media, and the public. The guiding principle is that public education can be a very effective tool to help promote understanding. Success requires discipline, leadership, and resources. Core strategies include public education and outreach, media outreach, and outreach to key audiences.

The key activity proposed is an information kit with materials that will help tell the story and that speak to the data and the cases.

Item 7 Subcommittee Meetings and Report Back From Subcommittee Chairs

The commission broke into its respective subcommittees. The subcommittees discussed the priorities for their work, including identifying issues, discussing major topic areas, coming up with recommendations, and planning next steps. Chairs of the subcommittees reported back with discussion topics.

Item 8 Education Summit/Miscellaneous

Mr. Wu reminded the commission of the education summit to be held in January in Sacramento. He noted that it is an opportunity for those interested to focus on policy to improve educational outcomes for foster youth. Some of the issues that will be discussed came out of a report submitted by the California Department of Education to the Legislature and the Governor last year. Many issues highlighted in the report still need to be addressed, and those issues will be the focus of the summit.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 PM.